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Astroturfing in the EP

Shale Gas Industry dresses up in sheep's clothing before votes

This week's plenary session in Strasbourg came to and end with questions hanging over the presence of the shale gas industry outside where MEPs vote. Posing as civil society before crucial votes took place on fracking Wednesday, this dishonest industry lobbying was in stark contrast to the real grassroots opposition of European citizens towards fracking. The "Citizens Coalition for Responsible Energy" (CC-RE) is anything but a citizen's movement. With "substantial and financial support … by PGNiG, KGHM and LOTOS" it is an appalling example of astroturfing. Industry promoting its wares right outside the hemicycle of the European Parliament at such a sensitive time would be bad enough, but to remove all industry logos and dress it up as a “citizens coalition” to try and give their position legitimacy is dishonest, and the opposite of the free and open debate that they claim to be calling for. There are rules in place that are supposed to stop exactly this type of promotion, but these are frequently ignored. At a time when the Parliament is calling for more Europe as part of the solution to the economic crisis, the acceptance of such misleading promotion is one part of the reason for the “sharp decline” in the image of the institution. 9 official petitions have been submitted to the Parliament from true grassroots groups, excluding those transmitted directly to local and national governments. They face an extremely well funded and organised industry lobbying campaign targeting MEPs and their staff to try and have their industry as unregulated as possible. When the votes were cast Wednesday, the Greens welcomed the Environment report (Sonik) which called for caution, notably a ban in sensitive areas, and underlined the need for tougher regulation and proper application of existing EU rules. The Greens voted against the Industry committee report however, which painted a far too rosy picture of the potential of shale gas, especially given the financial trouble and misplaced hopes the industry has experienced. Greens/EFA Co-President Rebecca Harms and Green MEP Carl Schlyter both raised the issue of industry pretending to be civil society during the debates. An open and free debate is something the Greens always welcome, but it requires honesty from all sides. For any industry or group to claim to be a "citizens coalition" or operate with anything other than transparency is damaging for the debate overall and the democratic process. We will continue to work on our own information campaign to inform citizens of the realities surrounding shale gas and fracking.

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